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Abstract

Method Meets Art offers an enhanced view on how the artistic lens can provide new ways of knowing and become a source of deep enrichment in science; a means to understand everyday realities and the world. It serves as a methods book to all arts-based researchers coming from different disciplines as it includes a comprehensive overview with practical variations and research examples. It may also be of interest to researchers and artists outside the qualitative community from various fields as well as to anyone who wishes to explore the merging of science and the arts.

Keywords

Arts-Based Research (ABR), Methods, Art, Qualitative Research

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When Researchers Embrace an Artistic Lens: A Review of Patricia Leavy's *Method Meets Art*

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Method Meets Art offers an enhanced view on how the artistic lens can provide new ways of knowing and become a source of deep enrichment in science; a means to understand everyday realities and the world. It serves as a methods book to all arts-based researchers coming from different disciplines as it includes a comprehensive overview with practical variations and research examples. It may also be of interest to researchers and artists outside the qualitative community from various fields as well as to anyone who wishes to explore the merging of science and the arts. Keywords: Arts-Based Research (ABR), Methods, Art, Qualitative Research

As a novice scholar listening to Patricia Leavy (Keynote Speaker) talk about ABR (Arts-Based-Research) at *The Qualitative Report* Sixth Annual Conference (see <http://tqr.nova.edu/tqr-conference/>) was inspiring and a great learning experience. I remember thinking; why am I trying to limit myself to certain academic rules when clearly I can look beyond them and into my own way of being and working? You see, as a performing artist, educator and scholar in practice contexts I have always constructed knowledge based on my experiences; without separating my thinking and doing nor depending on established theories or techniques. So from my artistic lens I am familiar with flexibility and openness to discovery, as well as embracing the chaos which enters in the reflective process of exploration, enabling me to practically and usefully organize my flow of experiences. However, I often find myself struggling to know how to articulate my practical experiences as I still try to confine myself to systematically organize and formulate an inquiry according certain standards' (Simon & Chard, 2014). So you can imagine what a thrill it was for me to read Patricia Leavy's (2015) *Method Meets Art* as it enhanced my view on HOW the artistic lens can offer new ways of knowing and become a source of deep enrichment in science.

In *Method Meets Art* Leavy shares several of her experiences in the field intertwined with practical ideas on how to conduct arts-based research and offers examples of how the arts are a means to understand everyday realities and the world.

I couldn't stop taking notes while I was reading the book as it stirred countless thoughts and ideas; continuously thinking, she's talking to me! Especially as I read chapter 4 about "Music as Method" (p. 121), describing how music-based practices can enable researchers through "musical lenses...to access, illuminate, describe, and explain that which is often rendered invisible" and "out of reach" (pp. 123, 133), a kind of realization, she says. So, based on my own practical experiences I totally agree with Leavy that music is "a vehicle for sharing information" (p. 124) and to access and highlight dimensions of social experiences.

Further, Leavy discusses how we have concretized our view of knowing and therefore must look for alternative ways, and ABR allows us to do so. According to Elliot Eisner whose work Leavy is influenced by, "the aesthetic is both a subject matter and a criterion for appraising the processes used to create works of science as well as art" since "scientists, like artists, formulate new and puzzling questions in order to engage the experience of creating answers to them" (1985, p. 27). And so Leavy explains similarities between artistic and

qualitative practices; both aim to illuminate, build understanding, or challenge assumptions. Meaning, both practices are “holistic and dynamic, involving reflection, description, problem formulation and solving, and the ability to identify and explain intuition and creativity in the research process” (p. 17). Again, reading this encourages me to continue formulating research inquiries based on my way of knowing as an artist and practitioner with the mentioned skills and abilities which I’ve developed during years of practice and performance.

Leavy raises another issue which I find valuable; usefulness and practical research. Meaning, if the work one does makes a difference? And how it impacts on the self and/or others? She says, “One of the advantages of ABR in general is its ability to make scholarship accessible to the public” (p. 180); for example, some arts-based projects have the potential to shape public consciousness and influence both public policy makers and personal choices, signifying that research can illuminate, educate and transform. Therefore as academics we want to do work that is engaging and of some value to others, yet there seem to be several limitations and so Leavy asks, “At the end of the day, do you want to spend all of your time and energy producing work that is consumed by only an elite few who are just like you? ...For most the answer is clear” (p. 31).

Thus, *Method Meets Art* serves as a methods book to all arts-based researchers coming from different disciplines as Leavy provides an updated comprehensive overview with practical variations, lists of suggested readings and research examples. But it may also be of interest to researchers and artists outside the qualitative community and various fields as well as to anyone who wishes to explore the merging of science and the arts.

The book can be read in order from beginning to end, but also, each introductory chapter or research example can be read on its own with a correct rhythm (Chenail, 1995). *Method Meets Art* is a piece of artwork that illustrates how “New pathways don’t just form, we have to create them – we have to blaze the trails we want to pursue and that will be travelled by others” (p. 304). And so as we perceive the world in numerous dimensions and layers of mental pictures, I must look for new ways to shape unrepresentable daily experiences into the presentable.

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Author Note

Matilda Mettälä from Malmö, Sweden, has a background as a performing artist, including a radio hit in the US. She has also been teaching music for 20 years. She earned her Master of Arts degree in Musicology from Lund University, as well as her Master in Science in Education. She runs her own business where she is employing music as a tool for the purpose of developing people and organizations. She believes that the inner resources of human beings may be developed and enriched through the kind of learning which incorporates with the individual's process of change by engaging the whole person and by means of aesthetics.

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